

What is claimed is:

1. In a lift truck, an improvement comprising:

two clamp members that translate relative to one another to grasp and lift material positioned therebetween, wherein one of said two clamp members has a central support bar integral thereto and laterally disposed between said two clamp members.

2. A lift truck according to claim 1, wherein:

said central support bar is adapted to fit into a slot in a conveyor belt system to thereby facilitate positioning the two clamps members around material disposed therebetween and supported by the conveyor belt system.

3. A method of handling material comprising:

packaging material into elongate bags;

automatically arranging the elongate bags into groups, wherein at least one group has a cross-stacked configuration; and

automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags, group by group, to form a multi-row stack of elongate bags whose bottom row comprises a group having a cross-stacked configuration.

4. A method according to claim 3, further comprising:

lifting and transporting the multi-row stack of elongate bags for transport to a customer.

5. A method according to claim 3, wherein:

the material comprises loose-fill thermal insulation product.

6. A method according to claim 5, wherein:

said loose-fill thermal insulation product comprises glass-fiber material.

7. A method according to claim 5, wherein:

said loose-fill thermal insulation product comprises cellulose material.

8. A method according to claim 5, wherein:

said elongate bags each have dimensions of about 38" by 21" by 8.5" and carry about 27 lbs. of product.

9. A method according to claim 3, wherein:

said elongate bags comprise a polymer.

10. A method according to claim 3, wherein:

wherein each group of elongate bags is transported by a conveyor assembly.

11. A method according to claim 3, wherein:

said cross-stacked configuration comprises two bags disposed side-by-side along their lengths and one additional bag disposed orthogonal to and adjacent the two bags.

12. A method according to claim 3, wherein:

said automatic lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags is carried out by a stacker machine having a moveable stacker head with fingers that grip a given group of elongate bags and at least one support structure that is operably disposed between bags disposed side-by-side in said cross-stacked configuration to prevent such bags from sliding past one another.

13. A method according to claim 12, wherein:

said support structure comprises at least one chain.

14. A method according to claim 12, wherein:

said structure comprises one of wire strands and rope strands.

15. A method according to claim 4, wherein:

said lifting and transporting of said multi-row stack is carried out by a lift truck having two clamp members that translate relative to one another to grasp and lift a group of elongate bags positioned therebetween, wherein one of said two clamp members has a central support bar integral thereto and laterally disposed between said two clamp members.

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein:

said central support bar fits into a slot in a conveyor belt system to facilitate positioning the two clamps members around a group of elongate bags.

17. A material handling system material comprising:

means for packaging material into elongate bags;

means for automatically arranging the elongate bags into groups, wherein at least one group has a cross-stacked configuration; and

means for automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags, group by group, to form a multi-row stack of elongate bags whose bottom row comprises a group having a cross-stacked configuration.

18. A material handling system according to claim 17, wherein:

the material comprises loose-fill thermal insulation product.

19. A material handling system according to claim 18, wherein:

said loose-fill thermal insulation product comprises glass-fiber material.

20. A material handling system according to claim 18, wherein:

said loose-fill thermal insulation product comprises cellulose material.

21. A material handling system according to claim 18, wherein:

said elongate bags each have dimensions of about 38" by 21" by 8.5" and carry about 27 lbs. of product.

22. A material handling system according to claim 17, wherein:

said elongate bags comprise a polymer.

23. A material handling system according to claim 17, wherein:

wherein each group of elongate bags is transported by a conveyor assembly.

24. A material handling system according to claim 17, wherein:

each group comprises two bags disposed side-by-side along their lengths and one additional bag disposed orthogonal to and adjacent the two bags.

25. A material handling system according to claim 17, wherein:

said means for automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags comprises a stacker machine having a moveable stacker head with fingers that grip a given group of elongate bags and at least one support structure that is operably disposed between bags disposed side-by-side in said cross-stacked configuration to prevent such bags from sliding past one another.

26. A material handling system according to claim 25, wherein:

said support structure comprises at least one chain.

27. A material handling system according to claim 25, wherein:

said structure comprises one of wire strands and rope strands.

28. A material handling system according to claim 17, further comprising:

a lift truck having two clamp members that translate relative to one another to grasp and lift a group of elongate bags positioned therebetween, wherein one of said two clamp members has a central support bar integral thereto and laterally disposed between said two clamp members.

29. A material handling system according to claim 28, further comprising:

a conveyor belt system having a slot adapted to receive said central support bar to thereby facilitate positioning the two clamps members around a group of elongate bags supported by said conveyor belt system.